

SONG OF THE DAY XCI

Another day, another classic from the archives of Led Zeppelin. Today we will look at a rather eerie track, filled with spooky music and lyrics that reflect a particularly gloomy atmosphere. It is 1:37 in the morning and the time couldn't be better to pull out your copy of "Houses Of The Holy," side two, track three, clocking in at 6:59, "No Quarter."

The centerpiece of all Zeppelin shows from 1973 through 1979, "No Quarter" begins with a very unnerving John Paul Jones synth, the low bass notes creating an added tension against the higher notes and when Page and Bonham join in, the track has a very haunted quality to it. {It should be noted that Page once again "borrows" a piece of the riff here... if you know Jimi Hendrix and his fabulous anti-war statement "Machine Gun" then you should recognize the six note riff that Page employs here. Hint: it's first played in "Machine Gun" at the 7:37-38 mark.}

This piece is another testament to Jimmy's studio mastery, as he used a technique known as "vari-speed" in which he slowed the tape down, thus slightly altering the pitch and giving the song it's signature sound, which is probably as close as Zeppelin ever came to sounding Black Sabbath-esque. Jimmy also uses some great effects on Robert's vocals, something he seemed quite keen on doing a lot on the "Houses Of The Holy" record, and here it succeeds quite nicely.

After a rather lengthy intro, when Plant finally does enter, his lyrics are once again brilliant and sung in such a way that it's almost chilling. The Page/Bonham combo drop out for the first verse and it's just Robert singing alongside Jonsey's synth/piano, until the full band explodes back in. It's another in the line of 'whisper-to-a-scream' songs and features some exquisite playing by all, but especially Bonzo's drumming, which he changes throughout the song, sometimes very subtly, and always with a great touch.

Close the door

Put out the light
You know they won't be home tonight
The snow falls hard and don't you know
The winds of Thor are blowing cold
They're wearing steel that's bright and true
Ooh...
They carry news that must get through
They choose the path where no one goes

They hold no quarter
They hold no quarter
Ahh-ahh-ahh

At this point it's back to just John Paul and we are treated to some extremely beautiful piano playing. Just as Plant is underestimated as a lyricist, so too is Jones as a pianist. Obviously, John Paul was always the most neglected member of the band, probably due in part to the fact that he was the bass player, but also because he was the "quiet one."

But don't let that fool you; he was probably the single most talented member of the group. He played everything from bass to mandolin to guitar to piano; he also arranged songs, was the person responsible for the riff in "Black Dog" and was a major and very vital reason for the sound and success of Led Zeppelin. If John Paul Jones had not been in the band, they would have not been as good as they were. And yes, I know that one can say that about every member in the group, and it would be an accurate statement to make, but Jones seems to never get the recognition he so deserves.

After Jonsey's brief interlude, Page and Bonham re-enter and we get a bit of a funky jam with some nice licks by Jimmy. It's this kind of jamming that, I feel, always separated Zeppelin from so many of their counterparts.

Walking side by side with Death
The Devil mocks their every step
Whoa-oh
The snow drives back the foot that's slow

The dogs of doom are howling more
Ohh...oh...

They carry news that must get through
To build a dream for me and you
Ahh-ahh

They choose the path where no one goes
They hold no quarter
They ask no quarter
They hold no quarter
They ask no quarter
Ooohhh-ahh

During the final stages of the song we get some great improvisation by Plant and one could tell from the album version that this was going to be a massive song on future tours. And, of course, it would be a tour-de-force on the stage. Often extending beyond 20 minutes in length with one known version well over 30 minutes, "No Quarter" became a vehicle to show off John Paul Jones' incredible skill as well as the trio of Page/Jones/Bonham jamming.

My personal feelings on this song as Zeppelin played it live are sort of torn. On the one hand I love many of the jams they came up with and as a person who loves the piano, I just adore listening to Jonsey play. But anything over 10-12 minutes is, in my opinion, just too much. Basically what it meant was fewer songs being played live so that they could stretch this, as well as two others, out to ridiculous lengths.

Of the three songs that Zeppelin played that featured solo sections, this is by far my favorite. Yes, Jimmy's bow in "Dazed & Confused" was cool, but "No Quarter" was such a spectacle live that it was superior to "Dazed" and "Moby Dick," in my humble opinion. Still, I would have preferred shorter versions resulting in more songs being played, but what's done is done and nothing can change it now.

I will say that "No Quarter," with its fog and light show and great jamming, was a tremendous and epic event in the live setting.

As stated previously, from 1973 through the Knebworth shows in 1979, "No Quarter" was in the set list and deservedly so. It was dropped in 1980, probably because of "All My Love" and never performed by Led Zeppelin again.

It has resurfaced as part of Plant's solo tours, usually in a vastly different format than what was on "Houses" or the Zeppelin tours. In 1998, on the Page/Plant tour, they did play "No Quarter" just as it was in Zeppelin, though it was shortened, and whilst it was nice to see/hear this live, it felt a bit odd without John Paul present.

In 1994, when Jimmy and Robert teamed up for the Unledded project, this was one of the songs given a new, acoustic treatment. I have stated prior that I wasn't particularly happy about John Paul being left out of this "reunion" but I must admit that I really love the acoustic version of "No Quarter."

On this version, which clocks in at a mere 3:46, Jimmy is using a twelve-string acoustic tuned to D-A-D-G-A-D, the tuning also employed on "White Summer/Black Mountain Side," "Kashmir," and "Swan Song" which would later become "Midnight Moonlight" in The Firm.

Jimmy's guitar is drenched in effects in this version and Plant has some cool echo effects on his vocals as well. Robert changes a few lines around in the acoustic version, but the overall vibe of the song is really tremendous. They also did an acoustic version of "When The Levee Breaks" for the Unledded show, but "No Quarter" was, for me anyway, one of the biggest highlights.

When the three remaining members hooked up with Jason Bonham on 10 December 2007 at the O2, they played a version of this in its original format that was in the 10 minute area and was, as always, very well received.

As I have stated many times, there are so many songs in Zeppelin's catalog that you simply cannot imagine any other band writing or playing. "No Quarter" is certainly one of those

songs. It was, and still is an epic song and live, presented the band in an entirely new light with its doomy intro, beautiful Jonsey solos and the extended jams the band would get into.

Time to close the door and put out the light,

Jeff